



## Celebrating Kapustin

**Frank Dupree brings Nikolai Kapustin's Piano Concerto No.4 to the Barbican Centre for his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Antonio Pappano (18 & 19 December 2024)**

**Pianist's landmark Kapustin series for the Capriccio label continues with 1 November release of the Ukrainian composer's Piano Concertos Nos.2 & 6 and world premiere recording of his Toccata for piano and big band**

"A classically trained pianist, percussionist and jazz player, on this evidence we shall be hearing a lot more of him in the future," *Gramophone* review of Frank Dupree's recording of Kapustin's Piano Concerto No.4 (October 2021)

Frank Dupree is on a mission. The 32-year-old German pianist and conductor, hailed as 'hugely gifted' by *Gramophone*, is determined to raise awareness of Nikolai Kapustin and bring the Ukrainian composer's concertos to a mainstream audience. He's set to do precisely that when he makes his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Antonio Pappano in Kapustin's Piano Concerto No.4 at the Barbican Centre on 18 & 19 December 2024. The virtuoso showpiece, strikingly diverse in invention yet cast as a single, concentrated movement, takes its place in the programme alongside other jazz-infused compositions by Gershwin and Bernstein, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's take on Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker Suite*, and Leroy Anderson's festive *Sleigh Ride*.

Dupree's wholehearted commitment to Kapustin also shines bright in his latest disc for Capriccio, the third in an ongoing series devoted to the composer's six piano concertos and other concertante works for piano and orchestra. The album, scheduled for release on 1 November, was made in partnership with the SWR Symphonieorchester, SWR Big Band and Dominik Beykirch. Its tracklist comprises the composer's swinging Second and Sixth Piano Concertos and includes four shorter pieces with big band, the world premiere recording of the complete Toccata Op.8 among them. Dupree will return to the studio next year to record Kapustin's First and Third Piano Concertos, for the final album in the first complete recording of the composer's works for piano and orchestra.

Nikolai Kapustin was born in 1937 in Horlivka. Having studied piano with Alexander Goldenweiser at Moscow Conservatory, he began his professional career during the years of the Khrushchev Thaw. He navigated the Soviet regime's often contradictory policies concerning jazz and popular music while working with Moscow's leading light and film music orchestras. Kapustin's compositions colonised the creative territory between the two worlds of jazz and classical music, comparable to American composer Gunther Schuller's 'third stream' fusion of elements from both genres. Although his fiendishly difficult music for piano evokes the spontaneity of jazz improvisation, it was carefully composed and notated in fine detail. Kapustin's Fourth Piano Concerto, composed in 1989, embraces a breathtaking diversity of styles. It contains elements of boogie-woogie and bebop, a ballad-like central slow section, and textures and gestures reminiscent of Prokofiev.

"Kapustin, who died four years ago, is the bridge between these worlds of jazz and classical," observes Frank Dupree. "I see this space between the two and want to go there. It feels like home to me. They're not such different worlds. I think the old boundaries between classical and jazz no longer exist, at least not in the minds of most players and audiences today. Orchestral musicians love to play Kapustin, even though he writes such difficult music for them. After each concert, they always tell me they'd love to perform his music every day. They have so much fun, just to rock with Kapustin. That's the benefit for me after having to practise so hard to play his concertos: to have fun in performance and see audiences having their minds blown by his music!"

Frank Dupree, who took percussion lessons before studying piano, was introduced to Kapustin's music as a teenager by his high school music teacher. He fell in love with Steven Osborne and Marc-André Hamelin's recently released recordings of the composer's dazzling *Concert Etudes* and other virtuoso pieces and began playing a few of Kapustin's works. At the same time, he formed a jazz group and started to improvise at the keyboard. His broad musical horizons were informed by a percussion teacher whose tastes ranged across jazz, ethnic musics, mainstream orchestral works and contemporary classical compositions; the diet of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn that supplied the staple of his piano lessons; and the complex language of late modernist works that he learned while studying conducting with Peter Eötvös.

“Jazz and classical ran in parallel lines,” he notes. “One side gave me inspiration for the other. And it’s still like that! I realised that Kapustin was not just this funny guy who combines jazz and classical. There’s nothing ‘easy’ about playing his music. The easiest thing is to listen to it! Everything is notated in the score, but you have to interpret what’s there and ask, ‘How would it sound if Oscar Peterson played it?’ It’s about understanding the dialect. Kapustin was a fine composer with this high level of quality and artistry. That’s completely clear in his chamber music and piano concertos. Now we have the chance to bring him to the world’s big stages, with leading orchestras and to a much wider audience than ever before.”

Covid supplied the catalyst for Dupree’s Kapustin recording project. The Württemberg Chamber Orchestra Heilbronn, prevented by the pandemic from touring South Korea, called to ask if he had any ideas for a recording that might fill the gap in their schedule. “I said, ‘Let’s do Kapustin’. That’s how it started. I then recorded the album *Blueprint* with my jazz trio for Capriccio. They decided to continue recording Kapustin’s piano concertos and other pieces, like the Double Concerto for violin and piano and the Concerto for two pianos and percussion.”

The invitation to perform Kapustin’s Fourth Piano Concerto with the LSO arose after Dupree met Antonio Pappano following a concert he gave with the Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Frankfurt. “As a conductor myself, he’s one of my idols. I was about to conduct Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony and wanted to hear him do it. I went backstage after the performance to say hello. When he asked what I was working on, I told him I was practising Kapustin. He said, ‘Who the hell is Kapustin?’ So I gave him a copy of my recording of the Fourth Piano Concerto. He must have listened to it because he phoned to say, ‘Let’s do it’. I’m so glad I grabbed this chance and look forward to working with him and the LSO. This possibility for me is like heaven on earth.”

Kapustin’s Second and Sixth Piano Concertos, the first completed in 1972, the latter dating from 1993, form the core of Dupree’s next disc. The album also contains the first complete recording of the Toccata, part of which features in a YouTube clip of the composer filmed in performance with the Oleg Lundstrem Orchestra in 1964. Unlike the Fourth and Fifth Concertos, which are one-movement works respectively for piano with chamber orchestra and piano with symphony orchestra, the Second is in three movements and scored for big band with string orchestra and additional woodwinds.

“The Second has this super-extreme, virtuosic piano part, which is so, so difficult! In the Sixth, which is with big band only, you can feel the influence of contemporary jazz, maybe Herbie Hancock or Dizzy Gillespie, and this jazz-funk feel. Kapustin puts a bit of contemporary classical into the mix. There are hints of Ligeti or Alban Berg’s Piano Sonata Op.1 combined with jazz rhythms. I don’t know any other composer who could do this and make it work so well.” The score of the Toccata for piano and big band, he adds, includes music that is absent from Kapustin’s television recording. “It was exciting to discover pages that have never been recorded before.”

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**Wednesday 18 December 2024 & Thursday 19 December 2024, 7pm**  
**Barbican Centre, London**

**Frank Dupree** piano | **Sérgio Pires** clarinet | **Sir Antonio Pappano** conductor | **London Symphony Orchestra**

**Gershwin** Overture: *Girl Crazy*

**Bernstein** arr **Lukas Foss** *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*

**Kapustin** Piano Concerto No 4 Op.56

Interval

**Tchaikovsky, Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn** arr **Jeff Tyzik** *The Nutcracker* – Suite

**Tchaikovsky** Selections from *The Nutcracker*

**Anderson** *Sleigh Ride*